

STATEMENT OF
LOURDES SANTOS TANCINCO, ESQ.
Co chair, National Network for Veterans Equity
Chair, San Francisco Veterans Equity Center
BEFORE THE
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States House of Representatives on the
Filipino Veterans Equity Act of 2007 (HR 760)

February 15, 2007

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of this Committee:

My name is Lourdes Santos Tancinco, Esq. I speak on behalf of the Veterans Equity Center and the National Network for Veterans Equity. Both organizations are part of the newly formed National Alliance for Filipino Veterans Equity.

I. Introduction.

The Veterans Equity Center is the only nationwide service agency catering exclusively to the needs of the elderly Filipino World War II veterans. It was established in the City of San Francisco through the collaboration of community members and advocates concerned with the plight of the Filipino veterans. As of today, we have provided service to more than 1,000 veterans. The National Network for Veterans Equity is a loose coalition of different organizations including various Asian Pacific American organizations advocating justice and equity for our Filipino veterans and supporting the passage of the Full Equity Bill or currently the H.R. 760. The National Alliance for Filipino Veterans Equity is the only

formalized coalition of organizations representing Filipino veterans in the United States and the Philippines working to pass the Filipino Veterans Equity Act.

II. Full Equity Now

Ladies and gentlemen of this Committee, we strongly believe that only a full recognition and restoration of the full and equal benefits of all the Filipino World War II veterans will address this more than half a century of injustice brought by the Rescission Act of 1946.

As advocates for the full equity, our mission at NNVE is a firm and consistent commitment to attain full equity, no more and no less.

We face different challenges but we never shall give up. Consider the following factors:

1. Factors to Consider

a. The population of the World War II veterans is dwindling.

Time is a critical element for the passage of this proposed legislation. It is public knowledge that the greatest generation of World War II veterans is diminishing at an accelerated rate. There are still surviving veterans waiting for full recognition of their services and for the receipt of the well deserved benefits. We have witnessed and met at the Veterans Equity Center thousands of WWII veterans and most of them who passed away had a dying wish unfulfilled. Questioning why they were treated inequitably. It is very disheartening. Time is of the essence.

b. There is an increasing number of broad supporters from different organizations.

We are engaged in an extensive public education campaign about the bill ensuring that there is an accurate presentation of the history and the relationship of the US-Philippines during World War II.

NNVE's public educational campaign resulted in increased awareness. NNVE gathered support from various individuals, organizations, state, and local governments in support of the restoration of the full veterans' status to Filipino World War II Veterans.

c. The Cost of the Bill

One of the major challenges we are forced to face is the issue of the cost of the bill. It is very easy to defeat the purpose of the bill by concluding that this is an expensive bill. But is it really an expensive bill? Let us examine the following:

- The figure used to calculate the cost of this bill is inaccurate. The rate that these veterans die is faster than projected. Hence, if there is indeed a cost, it is a diminishing cost.
- The Veterans Administration figures based on its 2000 study needs to be reexamined. The San Francisco Veterans Equity Center is actually witnessing a faster rate of dying veterans than as reported in the VA study.

- For those receiving welfare checks from Social Security Administration, there will only be a transfer of budget from this agency to the VA should the equity bill be passed resulting in less or no additional cost to the Federal budget.

True, there is a dollar amount to the bill the exact figure of which is not accurate at this time. If indeed the cost is an issue, our response is to this argument is a question. ***When is the cost of freedom ever free? How can US ever have a short memory of the sacrifices of our veterans?***

- d. A legislation less than equity will not address the veterans' issue.

Benefit improvement bills that enhance certain veteran benefits for certain veterans are not responsive to this issue. Creating disparity for those who fought equally and those who risk their lives together is a greater injustice to those who are excluded.

2. Filipino Veterans Issue an American Issue of Injustice

The plight of the Filipino veterans is no longer just a Filipino issue of injustice but an American issue of injustice that has been clamoring for final resolution. For those of us who believe in the cause of freedom and democracy, for those of us who believe in fairness to those who had been fought for us, we are challenged to do what is right and advocate for what they deserve.

As previously stated, the greatest generation is fast diminishing. The younger generation is taking on this cause and until this matter is resolved it shall continue to present itself over and over again until we finally see the just resolution.

III. Conclusion:

Mr. Luciano Dimaano, an 85 year old veteran who lives in San Francisco vividly remembers his experiences 65 years ago. He said and I quote him "As a soldier fighting under the US flag, I never got tired of fighting. There was shortage of food, no medicine. When I fired my rifle I would stumble because my body was starving from nourishment. I was weak all the time. But I kept fighting to defend the frontline." Like thousands of other veterans, physical exhaustion did not prevent him from fighting.

We take on the fight for them. We believe in our democratic idealism and have faith that this great country shall not let the sacrifices, courage, blood and tears of our veterans be put to waste. There is no better time to correct this historical error. The time is now. War veterans should be treated right. They deserve no less than equity!

We strongly urge this Committee to support the passage of the full equity bill for the Filipino World War II veterans. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak.

**Testimony of Colonel Romeo M Monteyro, PA (Ret.), Spokesman for the
Filipino World War II Veterans Federation of San Diego County before the
House Committee on Veterans Affairs, February 15, 2007**

Mr. Chairman, Members of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for inviting me here today. In the next five minutes, allow me to dwell on a particular subject--- the loyalty of the Filipinos to America, before, during and beyond World War II.

Private Tomas Claudio, a Filipino, was a member of the American Expeditionary Forces which fought in France in World War I. A mere foot note in history, he is unknown to Americans, but U.S. Army records place him as the first Filipino to die for America. He was a farm worker in California when America entered the First World War. He need not enlist, but he did, out of patriotism and love for his adoptive country.

Then there was Jose Abad Santos, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Philippine Commonwealth. He became the caretaker of the Commonwealth government after President Manuel L. Quezon was ordered out by President Roosevelt. The enemy caught up with him in Lanao, Mindanao and was told to publicly renounce his allegiance to America and pledge loyalty to the Japanese government. When he refused he was tried by a kangaroo court and was sentenced to die by firing squad. On the eve of his execution, he told his son, "Do not cry my son. Show these people that you are brave. Not everyone is given a chance to die for his country." The loyal and brave Chief Justice chose to die for America.

In the movie "The Great Raid" the loyalty of the Filipinos to America was depicted factually. Filipino civilians risked their lives by smuggling food, medicine and money to starving and sick American prisoners of war. Resistance fighters blocked a stronger Japanese force and prevented it from reinforcing the prison guards at Cabanatuan City, paving the way for the successful rescue of more than 500 American POWs by a battalion of U.S. Army Rangers.

President Harry S. Truman said, as he reluctantly signed the Rescission Act of 1946, **"This does not absolve America of its moral obligations to the Filipino veterans."**

President Bill Clinton commented, during the awards ceremony for WWII Congressional Medal of Honor recipients of Japanese and Filipino descents, 59 years late, **"rarely has a country been so well served by a people it has so ill-treated. They risked their lives above and beyond the call of duty, and in so doing they did more than defend America. In the face of painful prejudice, they helped define America at its best."**

In Bataan, soldier-poet Lieutenant Henry G. Lee wrote this poem after he watched a haggard group of Philippine Commonwealth Army troops:

***Obsolete rifle without a sling
And a bolo tied with a piece of string
Coconut hat and canvas shoes
And shoddy, dust white, denim blues
These are the men who fought and fled
And fought again and left their dead
Who fought and died as the white man planned
And never quite learn to understand
Poorly officered, under fed
Often driven but never led
Lied to, and cheated and sent to die
For a foreign flag in their native sky***

Lieutenant Lee survived Bataan, the Death March and even the POW camp atrocities but was ironically killed by American bombs dropped on the ship transporting him to Japan.

Owed a moral obligation! Served well though ill-treated, subjected to painful prejudice! Lied to and cheated and sent to die, for a foreign flag in their native sky! Yet they remained steadfastly loyal!

Ladies and gentlemen of this Committee, isn't it high time the Filipino soldiers who fought for America in World War II, be rewarded, if only for their loyalty? I know it will probably be a question of money again. Former Congressman Stump who headed this Committee during his time in Congress, once asked, "And where do you suggest we get the money to pay the Filipino veterans?" My answer to that is, "from the same source which funds the Iraq war. The Iraqis have not done anything in defense of America. In fact most of them hate us, and even as we speak, are trying their best to kill American soldiers. On the other hand, the Filipino veterans fought for America and their shabby treatment notwithstanding, have remained loyal and ever ready to stand by America.

How loyal was the Filipino soldiers to America? Ask Col Ramsey, the living testimony to their loyalty. If had been in another country in World War II they would have turned him over to the enemy, or worse kill him and collect the prize money on his head. Yet today, he is here with us because the Filipinos remained loyal to the U.S.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of this Committee. That concludes my testimony today.

AN APPEAL FOR JUSTICE

**TESTIMONY BY ALMA Q. KERNS,
NATIONAL CHAIR, NATIONAL FEDERATION OF FILIPINO AMERICAN
ASSOCIATIONS (NAFFAA)**

**VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
FEBRUARY 15, 2007**

GOOD MORNING.

I THANK YOU, CONGRESSMAN FILNER AND ALL MEMBERS OF THE VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE, FOR THIS HISTORIC HEARING ON THE FILIPINO VETERANS EQUITY BILL OF 2007.

I AM DEEPLY HONORED TO SPEAK ON BEHALF OF THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF FILIPINO AMERICAN ASSOCIATIONS. FOUNDED 10 YEARS AGO, OUR FEDERATION AIMS TO EMPOWER THE 2.4 MILLION FILIPINOS IN AMERICA TO BECOME ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS AND LEADERS IN ALL ASPECTS OF U.S. SOCIETY. THE FILIPINO POPULATION IS AMONG THE FASTEST GROWING ETHNIC GROUPS IN THE COUNTRY TODAY, WITH ONE OF THE HIGHEST NATURALIZATION RATES AND A 76 PERCENT NATIONWIDE VOTER TURN OUT. WE HAVE SIGNIFICANT CONCENTRATIONS OF FILIPINO AMERICANS IN ALMOST EVERY CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT THROUGHOUT THE NATION. I DON'T EXAGGERATE WHEN I SAY THAT THERE IS A FILIPINO IN EVERY TOWN AND CITY IN THE UNITED STATES – EACH ONE CONTRIBUTING SIGNIFICANTLY TO THE POLITICAL, CULTURAL, COMMERCIAL AND SOCIAL LIFE OF THIS COUNTRY.

I AM HERE BEFORE YOU TODAY PRIMARILY AS THE DAUGHTER OF A WORLD WAR II VETERAN. MY FATHER AND FOUR UNCLES SURVIVED THE BRUTALITIES OF THE WAR, THE BATAAN DEATH MARCH, THE CONCENTRATION CAMPS, MALARIA, TYPHOID, AND DYSENTERY. THEY HAVE NOW PASSED ON, BUT THEIR BRAVERY AND THEIR PRIDE AS SOLDIERS HAVE NOT BEEN FORGOTTEN BY US, THEIR CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN. I OWE IT TO THEM AND ALL THEIR COMRADES, THE VALIANT FILIPINOS WHO RISKED THEIR LIVES FOR THE SAKE OF FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY TO STAND BEFORE YOU TODAY AND APPEAL TO YOU, OUR HONORABLE LEGISLATORS, TO CORRECT A

TRAGIC ERROR OF OMMISSION, AND GIVE THE FILIPINO VETERANS THE DIGNITY AND THE RECOGNITION THEY DESERVE.

THE SECOND REASON I AM HERE TODAY IS DUE TO A PROMISE I MADE AS NAFFAA'S NATIONAL CHAIR TO CONTINUE THE STRUGGLE FOR THE PASSAGE OF THE EQUITY BILL. SINCE NAFFAA WAS BORN TEN YEARS AGO, NAFFAA HAS WORKED CLOSELY WITH FILIPINO VETERANS GROUPS AND COMMUNITY ADVOCATES TO PRESS CONGRESS TO RESCIND A GRIEVOUS ERROR IN JUDGEMENT, A BETRAYAL, CALLED THE RESCISSION ACT OF 1946, BUT CONGRESS TO THIS DAY, MORE THAN 60 YEARS AFTER VICTORY WAS WON, HAS NOT RESPONDED FAVORABLY.

I AM HERE BEFORE YOU TODAY, REPRESENTING MILLIONS OF FILIPINO AMERICANS AND FILIPINOS WHO BELIEVE THAT THE VETERANS EQUITY ISSUE IS A MATTER OF HONOR AND DIGNITY NOT JUST FOR OUR VETERANS BUT FOR THE WHOLE FILIPINO AMERICAN COMMUNITY! IN SEATTLE WHERE I LIVE, I SEE OUR WORLD WAR II VETERANS LIVING IN SUBSTANDARD CONDITIONS, LONELY FOR THEIR CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN AND WAITING PATIENTLY FOR THE EQUITY BILL TO PASS SO THAT THEY CAN GO HOME. FOR EXAMPLE, BENITO VALDEZ, 83 YEARS OLD AND JULIAN NICOLAS, 85 YEARS OLD, TWO OF THE LAST THREE REMAINING FILIPINOS WHO HELPED IN THE GREAT RAID THAT RESCUED 600 AMERICAN AND CANADIAN PRISONERS OF WAR IN THE CABANATUAN GARRISON CAMP, LIVE IN MY BELOVED STATE OF WASHINGTON. THESE TWO GALLANT WARRIORS, SILENT IN THEIR ANGUISH AND DISAPPOINTMENT, CANNOT UNDERSTAND WHAT IS TAKING CONGRESS SO LONG TO CORRECT A BROKEN PROMISE.

TOGETHER WITH THE MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR FILIPINO VETERANS EQUITY, I AM ASKING YOU OUR LEGISLATORS TO SEARCH DEEP INTO YOUR CONSCIENCE AND CORRECT THIS INJUSTICE.

NAFFAA AND ITS PARTNERS IN THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR FILIPINO VETERANS EQUITY WILL NOT GIVE UP THE FIGHT FOR JUSTICE AND EQUITY. WE WILL CONTINUE YEAR AFTER YEAR AFTER YEAR, BECAUSE MY GENERATION WILL NEVER BE AT PEACE WITH OURSELVES IF WE DO NOT TELL THE STORY OF A PROMISE UNKEPT. WE WILL DO IT BECAUSE WE STILL BELIEVE THAT THIS GREAT COUNTRY CALLED AMERICA IS STILL THE BEACON OF JUSTICE AND FAIRNESS IN THE FREE WORLD. AND THE TIME IS FINALLY HERE TO SHOW THE WHOLE WORLD THAT THIS COUNTRY DOES NOT FORGET THE BRAVERY OF THOSE WHO FOUGHT FOR ITS FREEDOM.

TO THE ESTEEMED MEMBERS OF THE VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE, WE HOPE THAT YOU WILL ACT HONORABLY ON OUR MESSAGE – THAT

THE FILIPINO WORLD WAR II VETERANS HAVE BEEN TREATED UNFAIRLY BY THE UNITED STATES DURING THE PAST 61 YEARS. WE ALSO ASK THE AMERICAN PEOPLE TO SUPPORT OUR VETERANS' CAUSE AS THEIRS IS AN AMERICAN ISSUE THAT CRIES OUT FOR AMERICAN JUSTICE. I NOW APPEAL TO YOU TODAY AS OUR NATIONAL LEGISLATORS TO PASS THE FILIPINO VETERANS EQUITY BILL WITHOUT DELAY.

THANK YOU!

**STATEMENT OF
SUSAN ESPIRITU DILKES
HOUSE VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
OF THE
OF THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

February 15, 2007

Good Morning! First of all, I would like to thank the Veteran's Affairs Committee Chairman Bob Filner, members of the committee and Congressman Bob Filner's staff for allowing me to testify today.

My name is Susan Espiritu Dilkes. I am the daughter of a Filipino World War II veteran and a member of the National Alliance for Filipino Veterans Equity. I am also, the Executive Director of Filipino American Service Group Inc. (FASGI), a non-profit community-based, and social service agency in Los Angeles County which was started in October 1981, when a homeless Filipino World War II veteran was found sleeping in the garage at the home of Mrs. Remedios Geaga, one of the founding members of our agency. Since then, FASGI has assisted thousands of Filipino American World War II veterans with temporary shelter, health and mental health issues, food distribution, and others. FASGI operates a transitional housing shelter for independent living for more than four hundred World War II veterans and in 1996, with the help of the Filipino American WWII veteran's volunteers, FASGI launched the FILVOTE, Filipino American Voters

Mobilization, and has registered more than 13,000 Filipino Americans voters in Los Angeles County.

Last year, 2006, the Filipino-American Service Group, Inc. (FASGI) obtained a grant from State of California Department of Community Services and Development Community Services Block to outreach Filipino-American Veterans who are still alive and living in Los Angeles. The goal of the outreach is to reduce the risks of poor health resulting from inadequate housing, and to refer homeless Filipino American WWII Veterans to our shelter and to our Healthy Active Lifestyle Program (HALP) and to assist and to advocate for their Filipino American WWII Veterans for their benefits that were promised to them by the government of the U.S. in 1942 by Pres. Franklin Delano Roosevelt. For the pass twelve months, FASGI has worked at this outreach program but has referred only six WWII Filipino American veterans to our transitional housing shelter, because there are few of the veterans left. These men are now in there 80's and many are in very poor health.

If Congress does not act soon, there will be no one left. This is your last chance to correct a wrong, which is now more than half a century old. I believe you are men and women of good intention, and now it is time for those intentions to be converted into law.

Indeed, there are benefits beyond those that are visible on the face of this legislation. First, the passing of H.R. 760, granting full equity benefits for the Filipino American WWII veterans, provides the United States with an opportunity to rescue its reputation as a fair, honest and reputable country that honors its commitment. By helping the remaining 5,000 Filipino American World War II veterans who are living in the United States. Our country can take a long step toward rescuing its own honor.

Second, passing HR 760, improves the foreign relations between the Philippines and the United States. It reduces the political irritation of an unfulfilled commitment to the 13,000 Filipino American Word War II veterans who are living in the Philippines, and to the extent payment are made, it will improve flow of cash to the Philippines, a poor country in dire need of foreign support and liquidity.

This is the last chance any of us will have to RESCUE both the Filipino American World War II Veterans and the United States from a broken promise.

Thank you and please enact and promptly implement H.R. 760.

Congressional Hearing: 2/15/07
Testimony of Lt. Col. Edwin Price Ramsey, AUS (Ret.)

Chairman Filner and Honorable Members of the House of Representatives
Committee on Veterans Affairs;

My name is Edwin Price Ramsey, I came from Los Angeles to attend this hearing and I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you here today. Having appeared before the committee on November 5, 1993 and again on July 2, 1998, and since I will turn 90 years of age on May 9th of this year, I will never have another chance to contribute in some small way, to correcting a longstanding gross injustice to the Filipino Veterans of World War II.

To do so, it is important that you be aware of why I had a unique position during that time and have considerable knowledge in this matter.

In 1941, I was a lieutenant in the 26th Cavalry Regiment, Philippine Scouts, with whom I fought from the Japanese Landing in Lingayen Gulf through the Battle of Bataan. After Bataan surrendered on April 9, 1942, my troop commander, Capt. Joseph R. Barker II and I escaped and made our way to Pampanga Province in Central Luzon, where we met Col. Claude Thorp whom General MacArthur had sent out of Bataan to establish resistance behind the enemy lines. We joined Col. Thorp and began the Guerrilla forces in Central Luzon designated by Col. Thorp to be the "East Central Luzon Guerrilla area" under the "Luzon Guerrilla Army Forces" of Thorp. After the capture of both Thorp and Barker, and their later execution, in early January of 1943, I became the commander of the "East Central Luzon Guerrilla Area" (ECLGA). By the liberation of Central Luzon, it had grown to approximately 45,000 guerrilla troops.

With that background, I would like to address the question of the status of Filipino Veterans and their treatment, especially with respect to the Recission Acts of 1946.

In July of 1941, President Roosevelt authorized, through the War Department, the formation of the "United States Army Forces in the Far East" (USAFPE) under the command of General Douglas MacArthur and ordered the induction of the Military forces of the Commonwealth of the Philippines into and as part of USAFFE. It is impossible to see how these Philippine troops could be federalized into the USAFFE and not be part of the United States Army. Further, when we inducted the Filipinos into the guerrilla forces, we required that they all swear an oath of allegiance to the United States of America and the Commonwealth of the Philippines. Therefore, all those guerrillas that were recognized after the liberation would have the same status. In that connection, I question why there was a difference in the treatment accorded to the 65,000 or so Commonwealth of Puerto Rico troops and those from Hawaii and elsewhere,

who served in the U.S. Army and were later treated the same as American Veterans.

The USAFFE forces fought courageously, delaying the Japanese time table for several months, instead of the six weeks General Homma had been given by the Japanese High Command to conquer Bataan. Also, remember that only the Filipinos remained loyal to their former colonial masters while the Indo-Chinese turned on the French, the Indonesians the Dutch, and Malaya and Burma turned on the British. It was this unbelievable loyalty that provided the environment necessary to build the massive guerrilla forces that made it impossible for the Japanese to defend, in any serious way, against the liberating Allied Forces and ultimately saved thousands of American and Allied lives. General MacArthur personally confirmed this to me in a meeting I had with him in Tokyo in March of 1947. At that time, he gave me an autographed photo signed, "To Ramsey with the Admiration and Affection of His Old Comrade in Arms, Douglas MacArthur." My most prized memento.

For the sake of brevity, since we have so little time today, for more detail, please refer to my previous testimonial letters submitted in the earlier hearings on November 5, 1993 and July 22, 1998 and were incorporated in the hearing records. I would especially call your attention to the paragraphs on page 4 of my letter re: the July 22, 1998 hearing, referring to President Roosevelt's message to Congress on October 6, 1943, calling for our government to provide full rehabilitation of the Philippines at the conclusion of the war.

In accordance with the rules of the House of Representatives' requirement for witnesses, I have appended hereto a copy of my curriculum vitae and I hereby affirm that I have had no federal grants or contract with the government within the current or past many years.

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Edwin Price Ramsey